

DRAKONS OF A TURKIC TOMBSTONE IN THE ARMENIAN VILLAGE OF NORATUS

AFTER THE IREVAN KHANATE JOINED TO RUSSIA, THE TERRITORY OF CHUKHUR-SAD VILAYET (REGION) OF THE SAFEVID EMPIRE WAS TRANSFERRED BY THE BOLSHEVIKS TO THE ARMENIANS WITH THE PURPOSE OF CREATING THE ARMENIAN STATE. NORADUZ VILLAGE (RENAMED BY ARMENIA IN NORATUS), LOCATED IN THE CHUKHUR-SAD DISTRICT AND ITS AZERBAIJANI POPULATION REMAINED IN THE TERRITORY OF ARMENIA. THE VILLAGE'S OLD CEMETERY WITH MUSLIM TOMBSTONES WAS GRADUALLY DESTROYED. BUT ONE TOMBSTONE HAS BEEN PRESERVED BECAUSE IT WAS INCLUDED IN THE LIST OF HISTORICAL MONUMENTS PROTECTED BY THE STATE, AND ITS PHOTOGRAPHY AND INSCRIPTIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN PUBLISHED MULTIPLE TIMES IN ARMENIAN, AZERBAIJANIAN AND SOVIET HISTORICAL LITERATURE.

The miraculously preserved Muslim gravestone of Noraduz is the only witness of the true history of this region. The last Azerbaijani families moved to Azerbaijan in the 50s of the XX century.

Tombstones of the village cemetery with Arabic and Turkic inscriptions were destroyed gradually, imperceptibly. By the mid-80s of the XX century. the cemetery was almost completely cleared of Muslim gravestones. Only a few tombstones without inscriptions and one large, beautiful and old chest-shaped tombstone with an Arabic inscription and the date 1305 remained.

On the side face of this gravestone there is a pair of dragons opposing each other and an orphaned warhorse of the owner of the grave. On the end face of the tombstone, a mountain tour is depicted - the ancestral totem of the buried.

Who is buried in this grave and what do the inscriptions and symbols on his tombstone say?

Review of the epigraphy and decorative design of the tombstone will begin with an Arabic inscription placed around the entire perimeter on the upper narrow, horizontal, side panel of the tombstone: For the first time, the inscription was read, translated and published by the Azerbaijani epigraphist Mashadikhanum Neymat in the book "Memorial Monuments of Azerbaijan" (Baku 1981, p. 16, plate 19A)¹.

In the late 80s of XX, in connection with the beginning of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, local Armenians decided to finally get rid of the Muslim tombstones of the cemetery, but after learning that the old tombstone that remained intact had already been published in the scientific literature, they decided not to destroy, but "Armenized" it by adding an Armenian-language inscription on the upper (front) side of the tombstone. Original Arabic-language side inscriptions were badly erased and could hardly be read.

Despite this, in 1984, the Armenian epigraphist A. Khachatryan, while examining the monument, edited and supplemented the reading of the text by the Azerbaijani epigraphist. A. Khachatryan publishes the result of his version of reading in his article³.

After 7 years, in 1991, A. Khachatryan republishes the text of his article in the collection "On the coverage of the problems of the history and culture of Caucasian Albania and the Eastern provinces of Armenia." Volume I, Yerevan 1991, p. 272².

Text of the tombstone inscription and its translation, published by A.A. Khachatryan in this collection is as follows (p. 273):

At the beginning of the text of the gravestone, the 256th verse of the 2nd sura of the Koran (2.256) is written:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَن يَكْفُرُ بِالظَّغْوَتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ أَسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا أَنْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلَيْهِ ٢٥٦

Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood.¹ So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unfailing hand-hold. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing (2. 256).

After the Quranic text follows the text of the epitaph:

هذا قبر المرحوم الشهيد ، الواثق الى رحمة الله تعالى ، الامير
الاصل سعد الدين بن سيف الدين عبد الله
بتاريخ سنة اربع سبعمائة توفى شهر رمضان من يوم الاثنين .

"This is the grave of the late martyr, who achieved the mercy of Allah Almighty, the most glorious emir, the great Sa'd ad-din ibn Sayf ad-din Abd Allah. On the date of the seven hundred and fourth year (28. III - 27. IV 1305) Died in the month of Ramadan, on Monday.

The fact that the gravestone belongs to Sa'd ad-din ibn Saif ad-din, who was an important figure of the Mongol era, is said by another Armenian epigraphist T. Mikaelyan in his 2012 article "Review of Arabic-written (Turkic) epigraphic monuments on the territory of the Republic of Armenia"⁴.

By this time, the tombstone had already been badly damaged and had a false Armenian inscription on the top panel.

The photographs illustrating the article by T. Mikaelyan were specially made from such an angle that only the Arabic inscriptions were visible, and the Armenian inscription was not visible. The appearance of a new Armenian inscription would have been immediately noticed by readers and could lead to accusations of vandalism in relation to cultural monuments.

Sources mentioning the Chukhur-Sad region during the reign of the Ilkhans, Timurids, rulers of the Ak-Koyunlu and Safavids indicate that this region has always been under the rule of the Turkmen tribes, who were directly involved in the ethnogenesis of the modern Azerbaijani nation.

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History of Chukhur-Sad vilayet testifies that in all subsequent historical periods there was a dynastic residence of administration and a dynastic cemetery of local emirs who called

themselves Emir Sa'd. So, not far from the village of Noraduz, in the nearest village of Argavand (the former Azerbaijani village of Jafarabad), the giant mausoleum of Pir-Hussein, the son of Emir Sa'd, who ruled the Chukhur Sad region under the rule of the Turkmen dynasty of Kara Koyunlu, has still been preserved^{5,7}. The mausoleum built in 1413 is stubbornly called Turkmen by Armenians, forgetting that in the ethnic sense, Azerbaijanis are Turkmen. Two related Oghuz branches have united since time immemorial in the South Caucasus, dissolving into each other. Most modern Azerbaijanis associate their ethnic origin with the Turkmen and call themselves terekeme (nomad). The ethnonyms Terekeme and Turkmen have a single root.

The Turkmen, being a neighboring branch of the Oghuz tribe, called themselves Teke-Turkmen. At the same time, the word Teke in both Turkmen and Azerbaijani dialects denotes a male/leader of the Mountain Tur. Mountain Tour - Teke was a tribal totem of the Teke-Turkmen tribe and its image on the end panel of the Noraduz tombstone leaves no doubt that this is a symbol (tamga) of the family of Emir Sa'd ad-din.

Another traditional tombstone symbol with a Turkic narrative is the image of a war horse without a rider. The image of a horse "orphaned" after the death of its owner, forever waiting for its deceased owner, is available on numerous medieval tombstones in Azerbaijan⁶.

And finally, the largest, central and significant symbol of the gravestone is the image of heraldic dragons standing face to face. Probably, it makes no sense to talk for a long time about the fact that this is a very well-known talismanic symbol in the Turkic mytho-poetic consciousness and ideology. In the Turkic ideology and epics, the dragon is a protector from evil, bringing good, prosperity and guarding the supreme power of Khakan, or emir. In the grave symbolism of the Turks, the dragon is the protector and guardian of the grave and the soul of the buried.

The heraldic image of dragons face to face is found on numerous monuments of the Turkic world. As mascots of the city, they were depicted on the famous "Talisman Gates" of Baghdad during the period when it was under the rule of the Seljuks. Images of paired dragons face to face are found on numerous Muslim religious, civil and memorial structures of the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid eras.

Images of paired dragons are found on the famous Karabakh "dragon" carpets of the Safavid era. Dragons guardian of goodness and repelling evil are found on numerous objects of palace and aristocratic life.

Two dragons standing face to face symbolize harmony and cosmic order. The mystical protection of guardian dragons extends both to the physical (material) and to the afterlife (spiritual) world in which the soul of "the late martyr who has achieved the mercy of Almighty Allah, the most glorious emir, the great Sa'd ad-din ibn Saif ad-din Abd Allah."

EPILOGUE

The latest photographs of the gravestone of Emir Sa'd ad-Din published on the Internet and social networks raise serious concerns about its safety. Every year the tombstone decreases in size due to broken and broken pieces. There is not the slightest doubt that this last silent witness to the history of this region will be destroyed.

On the territory of the old cemetery of the village of Noraduz, renamed today by Armenians as Noratus, a huge and pompous museum of Armenian khachkars has been created. There have never been khachkars on the territory of the ancient cemetery. They began to appear from the beginning of the 90s, and today, for propaganda purposes, tourist routes are laid through the village of Noratus with its Armenian khachkars.

Hundreds of fake khachkars, "ancient" with chemical and natural express stone oxidizers and looking like old ones, are designed to convince new generations of Armenians and foreign tourists that the Azerbaijani population has never lived here.

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The stone dragons of the gravestone of Emir Sa'd ad-Din have been protecting the grave of their master from defilement for 700 years. Of course, the tombstone can be erased or even completely destroyed. But erasing or destroying historical memory is not so easy.

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5. Papazyan A.D. Arabic inscription on the tomb of the Turkmen emirs in the village of Argavand. Near and Middle East. Moscow 1962
6. Efendiev R.S. Stone sculpture of Azerbaijan, "Ishq", Baku 1986, fig. 90.93 (in Russian)
7. Mashadikhanum Neymatova Stone memory of centuries. "Ishyq", Baku, 1987, pict. 32 (in Azewrbajani)

ILLUSTRATIONS



1. Noratus village cemetery. Tombstone Sa'd ad-din ibn Sayf ad-din Abd Allah.
704 AH/1305 AD (photographed 1991)



2. Noratus village cemetery. Tombstone Sa'd ad-din ibn Sayf ad-din Abd Allah.
704 AH/1305 AD (photographed 2012)



3. Noratus village cemetery. Tombstone Sa'd ad-din ibn Sayf ad-din Abd Allah. 704 AH/1305 AD (photographed 2012. The letters of the new Armenian inscription are visible on the top panel)



4. Noratus village cemetery. Tombstone Sa'd ad-din ibn Sayf ad-din Abd Allah. 704 AH/1305 AD (photographed 2012. Original Arabic inscription of the tombstone)



5. Baghdad “Talisman Gate” (Tilsim Kapysi) 1222, Iraq



6. "Dragons - defenders" on the monument of the Seljuk era. Türkiye



7. "Dragons - defenders" on the monument of the Seljuk era. Türkiye



8. "Dragons - defenders" on the monument of the Seljuk era. Türkiye



9. "Dragons - defenders" on the monument of the Seljuk era. Türkiye



10. "Dragons - defenders" on the monument of the Seljuk era. Türkiye



11. The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices Al-Jazari 12th century



12. Brazier. 13th century. Egypt. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Bronze Manqal



13. Azerbaijan, Kazakh district, Dash salahly Village. Tombstone 1848



14. Azerbaijan, Karabakh, Dragon Carpet 17th century. Brooklyn Museum (Detail)